

# Relational Maintenance in Transition

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# Background Research

- Terenzini et al (1994)
  - High school friendships bridge the gap between high school and college
- Oswald and Clark (2003)
  - Use existing friendships to expand college networks
  - “Best Friends” became “casual friends” or “acquaintances
- How does this apply for romantic relationships?
  - Romantic required more work/investment from both partners

# Theoretical Framework

- Stafford and Canary (1994) Relational Maintenance
  - Openness
  - Positivity
  - Shared Networks
  - Shared Tasks
  - Assurances
- Baxter and Simon's (1988) Relational Dialectics
  - Openness vs Closedness
  - Novelty vs Predictability
  - Autonomy vs Connectedness

# Research Question

- How do relational maintenance tactics change during the course of a romantic relationship; specifically, how does the transition between high school and college affect interpersonal romantic relationships?

# Method and Participants

- Interviewed 10 Female college students
- Romantic relationship began when one, or both, partner were in high school that continued into college
- Relationships ranged from 8 mos. to 6 years
- Half of the relationships ended, half are ongoing
- Participants ranged from Freshman to Senior in college
- All partners are male, ranging in age from Freshman to a year out of college

## Results – Relational Maintenance

- Positivity – “we were fighting all the time, and it just wasn’t fun” (#4)
- Shared Network – “having the family support, and him close to my family and me close with his, I think has kept us together pretty well” (#7)
- Shared Tasks – “I wasn’t putting forth as much effort as I had been... he didn’t, like, pick up the slack at all” (#4)
- Assurances – “Honey, I’ve like you since 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I’m not going anywhere

# Results - Dialectics

- Openness-Closedness – “I think he shared them with me, and I didn’t share them with him. Just because I think I kind of knew at that point that it wasn’t going to last forever, so I just, didn’t feel the need to share” (#2)
- Novelty-Predictability – mentioned “It’s different, even the stuff that, I think, oh we’ve done that 100 times, or we’ve talked about that 100 times, it becomes something new, so I think just having that variation”(#8)
- Autonomy-Connectedness – “You don’t want the relationship to become you” (#6)

# Conclusions

- Most participants noted the importance of balancing autonomy-connectedness
- Drastic maintenance changes led to termination
- Couples with one partner older than the other generally lasted longer, regardless of gender
- Couples that took breaks lasted longer – able to reframe the relationship
- Acknowledging changes in both partners, and whether or not both partners accepted those changes, was another key aspect



# Limitations/Future Research

- All female participants and only one side of the relationship
- Limited time/resources
- Many participants were a few years out from the break up, interviews based on memory
- Future
  - Longitudinal Study
  - Involve both partners if possible

# References

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